

[Anecdotes]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Copy 1 Forms to be Filled for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Dorothy West

ADDRESS 509 E. 79th St. New York, N. Y. Apt. 21

DATE October 26, 1938

SUBJECT ANECDOTES INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ELLA JOHNSON

1. Date and time of interview

October 26, 1938 6-9 P. M.

2. Place of interview

Home of informant's daughter - 488 St. Nicholas Ave.

3. Name and address of informant

Mrs. Ella Johnson 488 St.

Nicholas Ave. (She is visiting her. Home is Boston)

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

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Informant is interviewer's aunt.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

None

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

See previous interview.

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FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE New York

NAME Of WORKER West, Dorothy

ADDRESS 509 E. 79th St. New York N. Y. Apt 21

DATE October 26, 1938

SUBJECT ANECDOTES INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ELLA JOHNSON

FOR FOLLOWING, SEE PREVIOUS INTERVIEW.

1. Ancestry

2. Place and date of birth

3. Family 4. Places lived in, with date

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5. Education, with dates
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates
7. Special skills and interests
8. Community and religious activities
9. Description of informant
10. Other Points gained in interview

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Dorothy West

ADDRESS 509 E. 79th St. New York, N. Y. Apt. 21

DATE October 26, 1938

SUBJECT ANECDOTES INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ELLA JOHNSON

I.

Every summer mother took us with her to camp meeting. Mother started cooking a long time before we left home; we took enough food, cooked food, to last two weeks. You didn't cook at all after you got to camp grounds. She baked pies, cakes, break, chicken; fixed smoked meat to carry; she took tomatoes and cucumbers; and a lot of other things that

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would keep. She put the food in a big cedar chest and that's the way we got it to camp meeting grounds. After we got there, mother put it in pots and pans and covered it up and put it in cold spring water so it would keep.

All I can remember about the camp meeting itself was hearing a lot of shouting and praising God and religious hysterical all day long, because the children didn't go to meeting. We were simply brought along because there was no way we could be left home. There were regular hours when the revivalist preacher, but all day long groups gathered in the tabernacle for spontaneous singing and testifying. Our mother was a deeply religious woman and was at church all day long. Therefore we children were free from sun-up to sun-down to play as hard 2 as we liked, and to stuff as often and as much as we liked.

The camp meeting was held in a cleared place in the woods about twenty miles from our home. The tabernacle was in the center, and the campers set up tents all around it. Everybody brought their own tent; that is, each family brought its own tent.

I remember a strange man came peeking through our tent flap once, and one of the girls threw a full chamber-pot in his face. And do you know, that man was just looking for one of his children?

II.

Here's a poem I said once on Childrens' Day in church when I was way less than ten. As I wandered around the homestead, Many a dear, familiar spot Brought within my recollection Scenes I had seemingly forgot. There the meadow orchard yonder, Here the deep old-fashioned well With its old moss-covered bucket, Sends a thrill no tongue can tell. To the garret dark ascending, Once a source of childish dread, Peering through the misty cob-web, Lo, I spied my trundle bed. Quick I drew it from the rubbish, Covered o'er with dust so long, When behold I hear in fancy, Strains of a familiar song. Often sung by my dear mother To me in my trundle bed. 'Hush my babe, lie still and slumber, Holy angels

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guard thy bed.' As I listened to the music, Stealing on in gentle strains, I am carried back to childhood, I am now a child again.

3

'Tis the hour of my returning, At the dusky eventide, Near my trundle I am kneeling, As of yore by mother's side. Hands are on my head so loving, As they were in childhood days. I in weary tones am trying To repeat the words she says. 'Tis a paryer in language simple As a mother's lips can frame, 'Father thou whom art in heaven, Hallowed ever be thy name'. Prayer is over, to my pillow With a goodnight kiss I creep, Scarcely waking while I whisper, 'Now I lay me down to sleep'. Then my mother O'er me bending Prays in simple words but mild, 'Father thou whom art in heaven, Bless, oh bless, my precious child.' Yet I am but only dreaming, N'er a child I'll be again. Many years has that dear mother In the quiet church-yard lain. But the memory of her counsel O'er my path a light has spread, Daily calling me to heaven, Even to my trundle bed.

III.

When my mother was a little girl and freedom had just been declared, she was dancing up and down and making a big noise outside in the yard. Her madam came to the door and said, "hat is the matter with you Helen? Are you crazy?"

Mother said, "No, I'm not crazy. I'm free, bless God, I'm free at last!"

IV.

Here're two ditties we used to sing.

I. Watermelon, cantaloupe, Sweet potato and salty po'k, Uh, uh-n-uh, UH UH, uh-n-uh
[??????]

continued

4

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2. Mosquito, he fly high, Mosquito, he fly low. Mosquito light on me ag'in Ain't goin' fly no mo'

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FORM D Extra Comment

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Dorothy West

ADDRESS 509 E. 79th St. New York N. Y.

DATE October 26, 1938.

SUBJECT ANECDOTES INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ELLA JOHNSON

The interviewer has found that the two ditties which the informant included were said by children on the New York streets twenty years ago. The origin of these two ditties is not known, although the interviewer believes that the one about the mosquito is either of Gullah or West Indian origin.